

Transport Update to Family Champions

Essex Family Forum raised the following questions to a representative with the Essex Transport Team. The questions were provided to us via our network of Family Champions who were representing many families across Essex.

1. When should parents receive the collection and drop off time ahead of a new school year?

It is normally 1 week before school starts. This has been impacted by new contracts and COVID, but for most children this has been met.

2. When will Meet and Greets happen with Kinect, the new Provider?

ECC are aware most of the Kinect Meet and Greets are taking place on Tuesday 01st September

3. Who provides the transport company with details of the child's needs?

Every child has a transport needs assessment, which is comprised of parent application, EHCP and evidence submitted or requested by the assessment team. All this is then reviewed by the assessment team.

Children with complex medical needs will have a further specialist health assessment by Provide.

The information considered relevant to the child's transport needs is inputted on to ECC's system and shared with the transport provider for the child's school.

This information is also included on what are called "loading lists"; a list of children which includes address details, parents or carers information, phone contacts, school name. Loading lists are shared when transport is offered, new terms, new years etc.

Issues can arise when changes occur during the school year and ECC are not advised. An example could be a child not requiring a wheelchair for school when transport originally awarded, but during the school year the child needs to use their wheelchair daily. School and provider accommodate change, but ECC are not updated and as such that information is "missed" off the loading lists, which can cause issues when there are new drivers, new providers etc?

The "nitty gritty" information, such as don't put child X with X or additional sensory needs such as needing additional space (that has not been included in the original assessment) should be provided by the school.

4. Route Planning – Who is responsible for ensuring the Children’s needs are met when planning routes?

The transport provider maps the routes out on receipt of the loading list provided by ECC and on the information ECC hold (see above) on children’s needs.

The school has sight of those and may make changes to include their knowledge (the nitty gritty – see above)

ECC are aware that the proposed route and seating arrangements at the beginning of the school (especially this year) are causing anxiety for parents and the children themselves. They fully expect there to be changes to these during the first few weeks, as schools and providers, in particular, realise what journeys are workable and which need to be altered. They have asked that parents adopt a “wait and see” approach for the initial couple of weeks. New applications for transport will continue during this period and, therefore, more routes are likely to be added and there will be more room for manoeuvre with regard to capacity and timings.

5. Collection and drop off times – COVID Impact

In addition to the above point, ECC and providers are anticipating a higher amount of school traffic/congestion due to more parents driving children to school to avoid public transport. This has been considered when providing this year’s collection and drop off times but clearly these may change depending on the real journey time once children are back at school.

6. Journey time

Journey times are often longer than a simple ‘drive time’ because of the other students travelling. Guidance states journey times should be 45 minutes for primary school children, but many children with SEN will be placed in a school where even a simple ‘drive time’ will exceed this, especially when journeys involve the collection of additional children .

Again, ECC advice is to let the transport routes settle for the first few weeks to see if any reduction is made to the child’s journey time for any of the reasons outlined in the points above. However, if it quickly becomes apparent a child is really struggling with an extended journey time, then contact the provider and/or ECC as they may be able to find a solution (e.g. re-ordering pick-up times on the same route).

7. Car Seats – what should happen when providers change?

ECC state they vary rarely fund car seats and seats are normally provided by individual families. However, they would expect car seats be returned to families that have provided them once a contract has changed (this may have been affected by the delay to contract procurement due to

COVID). In some cases they might be passed over to the new provider especially as many drivers are tupeed over (i.e. they move to work for new provider). If the new provider confirms this has not happened, ECC recommend that parents contact the previous provider to request return of the car seat. If the provider is not able to this (e.g. they've lost the seat) then parents should contact ECC.

8. Transport providers won't provide route details over the phone

This is a safeguarding measure as they are providing information about a child without knowing they are speaking to the correct person (for instance, could be an ex-partner who should not be provided the journey details). It is standard practice to ask the parent to e-mail them with the child's details and for the provider to then reply.

9. Transport Provider won't drop my child at a different address?

ECC's statutory duty is to provide Home to School transport for eligible children and home is defined as "the place where the child usually and habitually resides". ECC will not agree to collection and drop off to alternative addresses such as a childminder or grandparent address.

ECC are aware that transport providers do "accommodate" these requests as a private arrangement between parent and provider. The transport provider is entitled to charge a fee if they wish to do so, although some will do so without charge but others will refuse such arrangements. Sometimes the arrangements are made with the individual drivers.

ECC state that many providers are hesitant or will not accommodate such a request at the beginning of a term due to the potential for further changes to capacity and routes in the first few weeks. A request for such private arrangements are more likely be granted after those first weeks.

Parents should also be aware that if a provider agrees to accommodate a private request but then the space is needed by another child eligible for transport, then they would take priority and the private arrangement would be cancelled.

10. Travel Allowance

If parents would prefer to make their own arrangements to take their child to school rather than travelling to school in a contracted vehicle, then they should be aware that Travel Allowance is only offered when it is the most cost-effective form of transport, or if a child or young person cannot travel on a contracted service due to the nature of their needs.

This means, if it is cheaper for ECC for your child to be in a taxi and they have already been included on the mobilisation list, a travel allowance will not be offered to parents. Parents need to be aware

that even if a travel allowance is agreed, ECC will only award the difference in the cost to them (so could be as low as 2p per mile).

If you are considering taking your child off transport due to health needs relating to COVID, they may still award travel allowance, but these cases will be considered on an individual basis.